

This is an interview with Mr. R. W. Jones of R.W. Jones Trucking Company, 660 West 1500 South, Vernal, Utah on this the 28th day of July 1978. This is Mike Brown of the Golden Age Center.

Mike Brown (MB): Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, where you're from, family?

R.W. Jones (Bob): I was born in Drumwright, Oklahoma in 1923. I have four children, three boys and a girl. We came to Utah in 1949.

MB: How did you get started in this business?

Bob: I was born into it. I'm the third generation that's been in this business. My sons make the fourth generation. My father and his father started out in Oklahoma in 1908. I started in it for myself when I was seventeen, in 1940. With the exception of the three years I was in the service, I've been into it ever since.

MB: How did you happen to come into this part of the country specifically? Because I know there's a lot of work in that section.

Bob: It was mainly the Rangely Field that was drilling at that time. When I got my discharge out of the service, I came out and looked at it. I had wanted to move out west and that looked like a good prospect. So we moved to Artesia, Colorado, in 1946. We lived over there three years, and then moved to Vernal.

MB: What was life like in a boom town like that?

Bob: Well, on Sunday morning we'd go down to Rangely and pay the fines of our truck drivers and they'd be handcuffed to telephone poles. That's where we got our personnel to work for us. Our first year in business the most people I could have employed by me was three people and I had fifty-two for me the first nine months I was in business. So we had quite a personnel turnover in a boom town.

MB: What had they done to get handcuffed?

Bob: Oh, drunk, disorderly, and that would be the minor things.

MB: Who were you working for?

Bob: I was self employed, but I was working for Chevron Oil Company, Texaco, Standard Oil and Gas, Noble Drilling Company, Parker Drilling Company, Loefflin Brothers, Equity Oil Company, Gardner Brothers. Those are the names of the main ones we were working for at that time. Kerr-McGee Oil Industries also.

MB: Do you happen to remember a company by the name of Raven, Raven Oil?

Bob: Yes.

MB: Can you tell me anything about that?

Bob: Not very much. They had done their drilling prior to my time. They had what they called shallow well in the Rangely field. I've done some for Raven, but very little.

MB: Did you know any men who were involved with Raven?

Bob: I knew Mr. Bryson, Ralph Bryson. I knew him quite well.

MB: Did you ever have occasion to do business with Charley Neal?

Bob: No, Charley had pretty well retired, gone out of business. I knew Charley real well, but I've never done any work directly for Charley.

MB: How deep were they drilling in those days over there?

Bob: Around 6500, 6200 feet.

MB: What specifically did you do?

Bob: The first two years I was there, I just had small trucks. I mainly did what we call lease work and did hotshot work for the drilling contractors. But in the latter part of '47 I got large enough trucks to start moving drilling rigs in the Rangely field. I've been doing that ever since.

MB: Has that been your main business, moving the rigs?

Bob: Pretty much so. We've taken quite a pride in having the equipment and personnel to be able to perform that type of work. We really hold ourselves out to 100% oil field service in hauling needs.

MB: What kind of changes have you seen in the oil field business in all the years you've been involved in it?

Bob: Well, approximately thirty years ago we were moving the rigs in Rangely. I might also state that they are using the same type of rigs in Rangely now as they were then, some of them are the same rigs. We would take five to seven days to move those rigs within the field. Now we can move that same rig with the same number of trucks and the same number of personnel in one and half to two days, and the road out of Vernal to do it, where then we were roading out of Rangely to do it.

MB: How come you moved to Vernal if that's where the business was?

Bob: Rangely had pretty well died down and there were two other oil field truckers in the Rangely field, who were domiciled there. So, I told them that if they would stay in Rangely, I would come to Vernal and pioneer this. I moved the first drilling rig, the first commercial producing oil well, into the state of Utah in 1948. I moved the first drilling rig that came into the Red Wash field that discovered that field. I moved the first rig into the Altamont field that discovered that field. I moved the first drilling rig that made the discovery well west of Duchesne in what we call the Coke field now. I moved the first rig that ever drilled on Strawberry Reservoir, and I've also, up to date, moved the last one that drilled up there.

MB: Was it the Red Wash field here then that was more or less the first boom here?

Bob: No, the Ashley field, out east of Vernal, thirteen miles east of Vernal. They drilled approximately thirty-four or thirty-five wells out there and that was the first work I had done over here. I don't know just exactly what that number is, but I moved all those rigs except three of them, for that entire field. Red Wash was starting just at the tail end of that, around 1950, somewhere around in there is when Red Wash started.

MB: Have you ever been involved with N.J. Meagher?

Bob: Just from the business standpoint. I've done business with Mr. Meagher through the bank.

MB: What kind of man was he to do business with?

Bob: To me he was first class. He was a wonderful man.

MB: Did he give you a lot of help or.....?

Bob: He gave help when I needed it, yes. The first man who gave me help here was Jess Cheney, who was in Uintah State Bank. He was the one who really gave me my start.

MB: Was there much competition here when you first came to this part of the country, during Rangely?

Bob: Yes. When I first came to Rangely there was approximately, counting the small operators and the large ones, there was about twelve operators, oil field haulers in the Rangely field. Eight of those went broke. Two of them stayed in the field. The other two large carriers moved out, one went back to Oklahoma and the other went to Newcastle, Wyoming.

MB: How did you manage to stay in business?

Bob: I just got up before my competition and went to bed after they went to bed. I've tried to run my business and not hire people to run it for me.

MB: What kind of future do you see for the oil field business here in this part of the country?

Bob: My personal belief is that the future in it now is better than it ever has been since I've lived here. I hope so because I'm expanding this business with that intention that's it's going to be better than it's ever been. The last five years we've doubled our revenue each year and we anticipate continuing that for a while yet.

MB: What kind of problems have you experienced working in the oil field over the last thirty years?

Bob: Number one, my personal opinion, if you have a business and run it properly you have no life of your own. Your family suffers, you have no social life, and it's just a twenty-four hour demanding job. I'm getting to the point now that I have personnel hired [so] that I can enjoy my fruits of labor and get away from it some and let my sons run it and the personnel I have working for me.

MB: Were you subject to as much state and federal regulations thirty years ago as you are now?

Bob: No, I expect it has increased. We have fifteen times more regulations than we had then, I would be safe in saying.

MB: How has that affected you?

Bob: It's driven our costs up. It's taken more personnel in the office, more forms to fill out. I really can't see where any of it has accomplished any more than what we were accomplishing back thirty years ago with our simple forms and such as that we were filling out. We're getting the same answer now, only it takes a long ways around to do it.

MB: How do you feel about government regulations for a private business like this?

Bob: The more government steps in, the more of private business that will go out of business. This country was built on private enterprise, but they're driving it away very fast. Statistics will show how many fail each year, your small grocery stores, any business you want to name, your service stations. They anticipate now that it would be impossible for a small trucker in my business to start up the way I did with a shoestring and be able to grow right on up and acquire all the state permits and federal permits you need. Unless you had an awful lot of capital behind you, you could never do it, you couldn't do it the way I did with no money, just ambition.

MB: What was Vernal like when you came? I guess Vernal was in the midst of being a boom town when you came here?

Bob: Yes, it was. I wasn't in Vernal too much until I moved over here. Vernal has always been a warm city. We've always enjoyed trading here, even before we moved here, and associating with people we got acquainted with. There have been a lot of changes made in it. It's grown a lot, improvements, better water facilities, more recreation for the children, more churches, more

denominations and it's all been for the better, I believe.

MB: I don't really know how to phrase this. Was there a good attitude on the part of the townspeople in general towards oil field people coming in, Okies?

Bob: To me, personally, yes. They gave me a nice reception. I think the people who got the bad reception would have got that reception any place they lived. If you come into a new community with an open mind, you will be accepted as one of them. I never had any problems at all that would be worth even mentioning with the local people.

MB: So things were pretty good for everyone overall you think?

Bob: I think it was. Everyone overall.

MB: Was Vernal ever as wild as Rangely was?

Bob: No. Vernal wasn't as wild as Rangely. Vernal seemed to have real good planning in it right from the very beginning. You can sort of look back and see how Rangely was laid out now. There never was too much planning in it until just the last few years. They had the money and had the backing, but they didn't have the proper leadership, it didn't seem like.

MB: Have you ever experienced any labor problems?

Bob: Oh yes, we have our labor problems, but it hasn't been as serious as a lot of businesses have. I have personnel that have worked for me for thirty years right on down and I really haven't had that much of a labor problem.

MB: Have you ever seen any attempts in the oil field business to unionize?

Bob: Not out here to a certain extent. They tried it in Illinois, to unionize it. Of course, they got the rig builders unionized and that's when the jack-knife derrick was invented to do away with the derrick being built by manual labor. Due to the unions, the companies couldn't afford it, so they had to go another way. In the field work; the drilling of the wells and the moving of the rigs, performing the field service, that would practically paralyze the oil industry if we had to go union.

MB: Do you think there would ever be much of a chance of it becoming unionized?

Bob: It's hard to say. I don't see it right now because the union is not as strong now as it was a few years ago in any industry. They've taken such advantages of people and the people who join them, that the working man in starting to see the light that maybe the union isn't the best place to be, because if he's working for a legitimate company, he's making just as good wages, if not better, than he would be joining the union.

MB: What about nationalization? A lot of countries around the world have done that. Do you

ever see that happening here?

Bob: It's closer now than it's ever been.

MB: How do you think that would affect the type of business that you do ?

Bob: It's hard to say, but, there again, I'm sure you would have some new government rules and regulations. As each of those is added to it, it would be detrimental to my business. It would more or less take the enthusiasm out of it to keep growing and expanding if they put many more rules and regulations on us.

MB: Are there any men who stick out in your mind who had a lot to do with the development of the oil industry in this area?

Bob: I guess the first that comes to mind is Mike Dugan who was President of Equity Oil Company. I imagine Mr. Dugan could take as much credit as any one individual for helping Utah in the oil industry. In fact, it was his well that made the discovery of the first producing well in Utah.

MB: Is that Ashley Number 1?

Bob: I don't know the number of the well. I don't know what the number of that is.

MB: Is that in the Ashley Field?

Bob: It's in the Ashley field.

MB: Did you work very much with Mr. Dugan?

Bob: I worked for his company an awful lot and I knew Mr. Dugan personally. Well enough to go to his office and call on him, meet him out in the field and talk to him, such as that. He was quite a busy man, none was really too close to him, but he was a very cordial man. He would help the underdog. As long as you did your work right, he was pretty loyal to keep you working for him all the time and the company's always been that way with their employees. You never hear of anyone being fired from Equity if they're doing their job right.

MB: Are there any other men you can think of?

Bob: Mr. Cheney, back to him again with Uintah State Bank. I would give him credit for a lot of it. Also Mr. Meagher and Charley Neal had a good background that could give you a lot of good advice. I visited with him a lot. He was a very intelligent man to talk to.

MB: Just out of curiosity, can you tell me anything about moving the rock building for the DUP several years ago?

Bob: (laughs) Well, I guess we moved it, I really wasn't in on very much of it. I know that the weight was so heavy that after we got it loaded, we left tire marks on every street in Vernal that we drove over with it. They were there until the streets were resurfaced. We moved it where it came from near the city hall office to its present site. It was quite an undertaking to get it up there and not damage it.

MB: Some of the reports I've read said that it was dropped several times.

Bob: The drop was before they contracted us to move it. They had broken every type of jack they could find, damaged the building and such as that until they called on us to move it. To my knowledge, we didn't hurt the building a bit. We moved it and set it on its foundation.

MB: Would you do that type of stuff again?

Bob: Under the same conditions I would try. It was all a donation. I didn't charge anyone for it, even my personnel who worked for me donated their labor. So I expect I'd do the same thing over.

MB: Finally, tell me, what have you enjoyed the most about this type of work here?

Bob: It's such a challenge. Every day you do something different. It's never a monotony or routine. Every job the truck goes on when we sent the trucks out, they're going one way or another to a different type of job than they did yesterday. You have to orientate the man to change his way of thinking. They can't get in a routine habit here because today they may haul pipe and tomorrow that same man may go out and move a piece of equipment that weighs 80,000 to 100,000 pounds and cost \$500,000 to \$600,000. They use the same equipment to do that as they do to haul that load of pipe. But they can't have the same presence of mind hauling something worth as they do that load of pipe. Every day is a challenge. We have a daily dispatch sheet and you can review that and each page is just like a complete new ball game of what we're doing from day to day.

MB: I would assume then that you would be liable for any damage you did to equipment?

Bob: Yes, the company is liable for anything we tear up or damage, and I might state that my insurance company tells me that I have the highest safety record of any heavy hauler they have. I'm insured with one of the biggest companies in the Western states. In other words, they insure more heavy haulers than any other company does in all the western states. They say I have the best record of any of their customers.

MB: That's something to be proud of.

Bob: I'm real proud of it. There again, I give the credit to my men. I've had good men working for me and they do a very good job.

End.